

Published August 30th, 2023

Is there a future doctor in the house?

By Elizabeth LaScala



Doing College and Beyond College and Graduate School Admissions Services 970 Dewing Avenue, Suite 202, Lafayette 925.385.0562 (office) 925.330.8801 (mobile) www.doingcollege.com Elizabeth@doingcollege.com Elizabeth LaScala, PhD, brings decades of admissions expertise to personally guide each student through applying to well-matched colleges, making each step more manageable and less stressful. She has placed hundreds of students in the most prestigious colleges and universities in the US. Elizabeth attends conferences, visits campuses and makes personal contacts with admissions networks to stay current on the evolving nature of college admissions. She and her professional team offer resume development, test preparation, academic tutoring, value analysis, merit and need-based scholarship search and more.

When selecting a college to attend, high school students must take into consideration other important pre-med requirements. For example, if research opportunities are reserved for graduate students, as they often are in public research universities, then undergraduates may have a critical gap on their resume. Further, some admissions advisors focus their support on applicants who excel in the early pre-med coursework at their institution. They may counsel (directly or less directly) lower achieving students to consider a different health profession or aim for a research career. Be sure you have the support you need and the resources you require to assemble a strong profile. Ranked ordered, the main factors are grades in pre-med coursework, complimentary MCAT scores, sufficient clinical experience, a strong record of volunteerism and some research involvement.

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One of the most critical decisions you can make as a high school student is selecting the college that will best support your goals. If you have your eye on becoming a doctor, knowing what medical schools look for will help guide this decision.

For medical school admissions, earning a high GPA, especially in medical school prerequisite coursework, is much more important than attending a "brand-name" school. It is imperative that pre-med students get strong grades in the 5-6 prerequisite courses for medical school, including organic chemistry, a notorious 'weed out' course for premed students. Generally, large public research universities do not have as many personalized resources, like professor office hours and pre-med advising staff available to help students to succeed. They also tend to have much larger class sizes and often a tougher grading scale. It is important to realize that medical schools do not take the selectivity of the college nor its academic reputation into account - in terms of quantitative assessment, they evaluate the Math/Science GPA and Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) scores, which the prerequisite coursework prepares the student to take.

Since the screening process for medical admissions does not take into consideration the rigor of the undergraduate program or how difficult it is to earn a high GPA, it can be said that MCAT scores are used to 'validate' a student's GPA. For example, a high GPA from a lesser-known or highly recognized school is affirmed when a student scores well on the MCAT. It proves that the applicant knows the subject matter well and their academic success is not limited to the confines of undergraduate coursework. Contrarily, if a student with a high GPA scores poorly on the MCAT, the low score is a red flag to medical schools.

As such, medical school applicants must take the MCAT very seriously and aim to score well. Unlike standardized tests for college admissions, it is not wise to plan to take the MCAT multiple times. My advice is to take the required coursework, set aside 16 weeks for focused study, and get your best score the first time. I only recommend retesting if a) you are certain you can achieve a higher score, or b) you have older scores that schools you want to apply to will not accept.